# Memories of Home in Partition Narratives

## SYNOPSIS

of the Thesis submitted for the award of
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Submitted by

**Akshatha MG**
**June 2022**

Placed in the context of Partition narratives, this thesis explores the relationship between memory and home. After a review of the available critical material on fictional narratives of the 1947 Partition, the thesis locates its research gap in the general absence of the discussion of the concept of memory particularly with reference to home. While literary texts themselves are considered sites of memory, the discussion of the chosen texts foregrounds multiple sites of memory used within these narratives. The thesis also discusses how the fictional narratives of Partition understand home and give shape to the memories of home.

The study has chosen four Partition novels through which the concepts of memory and home have been addressed. The texts chosen are *Sunlight on A Broken Column* (1961) by Attia Hosain, *The Shadow Lines* (1988) by Amitav Ghosh, *Sleepwalkers* () by Joginder Paul and *What the Body Remembers* () by Shauna Singh Baldwin. The thesis is structured into six chapters. The first chapter is introductory, followed by four core chapters on the chosen texts and the last chapter provides a conclusion.

The thesis has adopted a concept based analysis of the chosen texts. Locating memory and home as central concepts for the discussion of the chosen texts, the thesis also explores relationship between memory and place, memory and body, memory and nostalgia, memory as a liminal space, and these discussions are centred on analysis of the representation of home. In the process of discussion, reference has been made to Svetlana Boym's discussion of nostalgia, Dylan Trigg's discussion of memory and place, Elaine Scarry's discussion of the body, Foucault's discussion of space and place, and Homi Bhabha's discussion of liminality among others. The review of the concept of home suggests home as a ubiquitous concern in literature; in its Indian context, the thesis draws upon Dipesh Chakrabarty's discussion of home.

The first chapter is titled “Introduction” and it provides a socio-political and historical understanding of the event of Partition, as has been represented in the fictional and non-fictional writings, identifying some common themes and changing trends in the representation of the event. The chapter presents the thesis statement, review of literature, review of the chosen concepts, justification of the choice of texts, objectives, methodology, chapterisation, limitations and a conclusion.

The second chapter is titled ‘Homely Transitions and Transformations: *Sunlight on a Broken Column*”. Considering the family home Ashiana as a site of memory, this chapter discusses how the narrative of *Sunlight on A Broken Column* portrays the centrality of place and the structure of house in the constitution of an individual’s sense of home and how house is transformed into a site of memory. The discussion foregrounds how the narrative portrays the transformation of home at three different levels: the household of Ashiana, the home city of Lucknow and the homeland.

The third chapter is titled “Mapping the home/s Spanning Nations: *The Shadow Lines”*. The discussion locates ‘maps’ as the central site of memory within the narrative. This chapter discusses the narrator’s memories of home, the centrality of cartographical maps in his memories of home, and the narrator’s construction of memory maps or mental maps, based on the accounts given to him by others. Mapping the locations of multiple houses in the narrative, spread across continents, this chapter argues that despite the presence of multiple houses the narrative does not attach the idea of home to any one place.

The fourth chapter is titled “Homely within Nostalgia: *Sleepwalkers*”. This chapter locates the Mohajirs Lucknow, the locus of action in the narrative, as the central site of memory.

This chapter discusses how the remembering subjects within the fictional narrative place themselves in the liminal space of homely memory, trying to cope with the depth of transformations around them. Through nostalgia, the remembering subject achieves his/her journey of transition from the past to the present, from the home to the (new) homeland.

The fifth chapter is titled "Remembering Homely Bodies: *What the Body Remembers*". Locating body as the central site of memory in the narrative, this chapter discusses how Baldwin explicates the experience of home from the perspective of women in the given religious and cultural setup of the novel. The focus is on discussing how a woman's space and place within the home are centered on her function as a body. As the narrative shows, the function of a woman within the home is that of a body that obeys, reproduces, and carries the honour of the family, religion, quom, and the nation. This is the body that re-members home in *What the Body Remembers*.

The sixth chapter is titled "Towards Conclusion". This chapter focuses on the findings of the thesis. This chapter discusses how the texts chosen foreground the centrality of home and family within the narrative. It also has a brief discussion, grouping Attia Hosain and Joginder Paul as the first generation writers of Partition, who remember and re-create their experience of witnessing the 1947 Partition. Amitav Ghosh and Shauna Singh Baldwin belong to the generation that came after Partition, for whom the trauma of 1947 is post-memory. The chapter highlights how the chosen fictional narratives present the meaning of home as one that transcends all borders. It discusses how the chosen narratives present home as much more than a place, a piece of land, or a structure. The sensory experience of the place is a part of what makes a place a home while the emotional attachment to the home and homeland is interconnected with family, culture, and society. The chosen authors and their texts present multiple ways in which

memory affects individual psyche and multiple understandings of home in their fictional representations.

This study believes that the analysis Partition fiction will further our understanding of the ways of memory. Amidst the increasing religious and political unrest in the recent decades, this study hopes to create an awareness of the past to help society to understand the consequence of trauma and human suffering that follows ill-conceived religious and political allegiances.

Akshatha MG
Research Scholar
Department of English

Prof. Ravishankar Rao
Research Guide
Department of English

The Chairperson
Department of English